

Starting Off on the Right Foot

(Answers to Questions Frequently Asked
by First-Time Candidates)

March 2000

• Which Candidates Must File Disclosure Reports?

Candidates running for state office must file personal financial affairs statements and campaign disclosure reports. Local office candidates in jurisdictions of under 1,000 registered voters as of last year's general election have no reporting requirements. Those in jurisdictions of 1,000 or more registered voters as of last year's general election must file financial affairs statements. Local office candidates in jurisdictions of 5,000 or more registered voters, or covering an entire county, must also file campaign disclosure reports. Take note that it's the number of voters in a jurisdiction that matters, not the number of voters in a candidate's district. Your county elections officials can tell you how many voters were in each jurisdiction as of last year's general election.

• What Starts the Whole Process?

Becoming a candidate. And, according to the disclosure law, you become a candidate when you: raise and spend money for your campaign, reserve space or purchase advertising to promote your candidacy, authorize someone else to do any of these activities for you, state publicly that you're seeking office, or file for office, whichever happens first.

• Once I Become a Candidate, Then What?

Within two weeks of the date you become a candidate, do the following: 1) Fill out a personal Financial Affairs Statement (Form F-1) and mail it to PDC (persons who have a current F-1 on file with PDC need not re-file); and 2) Fill out the Candidate Registration form (Form G-1) and mail the original to PDC and a copy to your county auditor. (In King County, send copy to the Division of Records and Elections.) Local ordinances may require you to file these forms with your city clerk, too.

• Where Do I Get Copies of Blank Forms and Instruction Manuals?

Call PDC (360/753-1111) or order materials in the space provided on the C-1. County auditors (King County: Div. Of Records & Elections) also stock PDC forms, manuals and brochures.

• I Suspect There's More to This Reporting . . . Am I Right?

Probably, it depends on how much you're going to raise and spend on your campaign.

If you choose Mini Reporting (because during the course of your campaign you're raising and spending no more than \$500 in addition to your filing fee and you won't accept more than \$200 from any contributor besides yourself), the C-1 and the F-1 are the only PDC reports you have to file. Be sure to obtain a copy of the Mini and Abbreviated Reporting Manual and read it carefully.

If you choose Abbreviated Reporting (because you're going to raise and spend \$2,000 or less, including the amount of your filing fee, and you won't accept more than \$200 from any contributor besides yourself), you only have to file one additional report, PDC Form ABB C-4, by the 10th of the first month following the election. Be sure to obtain a copy of the Mini and Abbreviated Reporting Manual and read it carefully.

If you're going to raise and spend over \$2,000 to get elected (or less than that, but you want to accept more than \$200 from one or more donors), you fall into the Full Reporting category and you'll be filing frequent contribution and expenditure reports (Forms C-3 and C-4, respectively). Be sure to obtain a copy of the Local and Judicial Office Candidates manual or the State Executive & Legislative Candidates manual, depending on the office you're seeking. Both you and your treasurer should read the manual carefully.

• When are Contribution and Expenditure Reports Due?

C-3 Contribution Reports: Before July 1, candidates fill out a C-3 report for each bank deposit made and file the reports with their C-4 reports. Beginning July 1, on each Friday, campaigns must file C-3 reports of the bank deposits made during the previous 7 days. Since contributions must be deposited within 5 business days of receipt, active campaigns will make at least one weekly deposit and, on Fridays, file a C-3 for each deposit.

C-4 Summary Reports: This report, along with its attached schedules, summarizes the campaign's financial activity and shows itemized expenditures; it's due:

From January through July, if a campaign has over \$200 in contribution or expenditure activity during a month, a C-4 report is filed by the 10th of the following month; During August through December, C-4 reports are due 21 and 7 days before the primary and general elections, even if there was little or no activity to report. Primary losers will also file on October 10. General election candidates will file an additional C-4 on December 10. Obtain the 2000 Key Reporting Dates for Candidates.

All PDC reports are considered filed as of the postmark date or the date they are hand-carried to the PDC office.

- **Where Do I File PDC Reports?**

The personal financial affairs statement (F-1) is, in most cases, filed only with PDC in Olympia. Send the original of all campaign reports (the "C" series) to PDC; provide a copy of these campaign reports to your county auditor. (King County: Div. Of Records and Elections). By local ordinance, city office candidates may also have to file copies of "C" reports and the F-1 with their city clerk.

- **Must I Have a Separate Campaign Account?**

Yes. By law, candidates must open a separate campaign account in a bank, credit union or savings and loan institution. However, candidates using Mini Reporting have been permitted to use their personal checking or savings account for campaign purposes. They must be prepared, though, to allow anyone to review their check book register during the eight days before the election when campaign records are open for public inspection.

- **May I Serve as My Own Treasurer?**

Yes. However, candidates using Full Reporting are strongly encouraged to enlist the aid of a treasurer who has the time and energy necessary to keep detailed, accurate records and file frequent reports. Your treasurer does not need to be a professional accountant.

- **From Whom May I Accept Contributions?**

Generally, contributions from individuals, corporations, unions and other organizations are permitted. Candidates for legislative and state executive office have special contributor restrictions. By federal law, no foreign corporations or citizens (unless they have green cards) may contribute to or spend funds on behalf of U.S. candidates. A candidate may personally finance his/her entire campaign. Local restrictions may apply to candidates seeking some county and city offices. Check with your county auditor (King County: Division of Records & Elections) or your city clerk.

- **Is There a Contribution Limit?**

State law sets contribution limits on donations to legislative and state executive office candidates as well as bona fide political party and caucus political committees. See instruction manuals for details. Also, during the 21 days before the general election, no contributor (except the state committee of the Democratic or Republican Party or a minor party) may give more than a total of \$50,000 to a state-wide office candidate or \$5,000 to any other candidate or political committee. This restriction also applies to a candidate's contributions to his or her own campaign. Candidates must not accept contributions that exceed their respective limits. Additional local restrictions may apply to candidates seeking local office.

- **Is There an Expenditure Limit?**

Although Mini and Abbreviated reporting have expenditure maximums, no other expenditure limit exists in state law.

- **Must I Identify All Contributors?**

Anyone who gives you more than a total of \$25 during the course of your campaign in monetary and in-kind contributions must be identified by name and full address. Plus, if an individual gives you a total of \$100 or more, you must also show this person's occupation and the name, city and state of his or her employer.

- **May I Be Reimbursed for the Personal Funds I Spend on My Campaign?**

A candidate's contributions to his or her own campaign must first be reported as loans in order to be eligible for repayment. If you loan your campaign over \$3,800 per election, however, you may only be repaid up to \$2,800 for primary election loans and \$3,800 for general election loans. If you keep receipts or other detailed records concerning out-of-pocket expenses, the campaign may reimburse you as long as it does so promptly.

- **Are There Laws Governing Political Ads?**

Yes. Details are in PDC's Political Advertising brochure or the Political Advertising section in your instruction manual.

For more information, contact PDC at (360) 753-1111, pdc@pdc.wa.gov (e-mail), or visit PDC's Website <http://www.pdc.wa.gov>.